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Saturday travel

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IT'S SALT

A visit to part of Utah that is forever inspired by Scotland

By Paul English

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DISCLAIMER: You're about to read an article about skiing in the hills around Ben Lomond.

But references to lethal mud patches or pouring rain, giant queues at Glencoe Ski Centre or long drives home along the hellish A82 will not be made.

Instead, there'll be praise of top ski facilities, first-class dining - and a nod to the local Mormon population.

This isn't skiing in the shadow of Ben Lomond at the gateway to the Scottish highlands.

It's playing around on the white stuff in the ski areas of the Wasatch mountains, a range in the Rockies surrounding Salt Lake City, Utah, in America's mid-west.

And it's all in the shadow of a mountain named by 19th century Scottish immigrants, the same one which went on to become the studio logo for Paramount Pictures.

There are two popular misconceptions about Utah - it's entirely alcohol-free and every man there has nine wives.

Locals scoff politely at polygamy the same way as we laugh about the Loch Ness Monster.

Slogan

While some extremist Mormons do have "in" and "out" doors on their houses, it's by far the exception rather than the rule. Similarly, alcohol might not be the cornerstone of every night out but it's anything but a dry state - there's even a local ale called Polygamy Porter.

The State wanted to convey a different image. According to the slogan on every car licence plate, Utah has "The Best Snow In The World".

Having only skied in four countries, my own research into this claim is probably every bit as scientific as theirs - ie not very.

But having now experienced skiing at seven resorts within striking distance of Salt Lake City, I'm confident Utah offers an abundance of great skiing opportunities in America - although that's not the snappiest of licence-plate slogans either.

Having hired a car at one of the ski hire outlets downtown, we drove between seven resorts over five days, all within an hour's drive from SLC: Alta (a "no snowboarder" zone), Snowbird, Solitude, Snowbasin, Deer Valley, Park City (complete with

white knuckle Alpine roller-coaster) and Sundance.

Fans of the European ski-in ski-out experience will favour Park City and Deer Valley, both calling to mind some of Europe's more chichi spots. For uncrowded piste cruising, the aptly-named Solitude ticks all boxes, with Snowbasin's long blue runs perfect for intermediates and families.

Snowboarding students enjoying beers in the lively bars of Park City - a town, not really a city - told me they often bet each other to ride into "ski-only" resorts from neighbouring areas, posting footage of the proof online.

I'm assured that the sound of blasts echoing around Alta was the avalanche control team at work and not snipers taking out trespassing boarders.

As is often the case in America, the historical tendrils of Scottish immigration emerge easily. There's

a bizarre Scottish souvenir shop in Salt Lake City, a stone's throw from Salt Lake Temple, aka Mormon HQ.

There are Scottish-inspired fittings and fixtures in the Needles Lodge restaurant at Snowbasin where Rich, our mountain guide, revealed a taste for gritty Scottish flicks Red Road and Sweet Sixteen.

Both were cultural hangovers from the annual film festival at Robert Redford's nearby Sundance, itself a boutique ski resort celebrated for ecological principles, sumptuous spa and unparalleled apres-ski options. Even on a one-night stay, including floodlit skiing, a buffalo steak dinner and a hot stone massage, I saw what all the fuss was about.

The skiing over. I set my sights on less crowded terrain and struck out to experience Utah's other main draw and the iconography of the "wild" west in Navajo territory on a solo road-trip through snowy desert

and canyons. Destination: Monument Valley, 500 miles south of Salt Lake City in the vast Navajo reservation, bordering Utah and Arizona.

Think of any John Wayne/John Ford classic movie collaboration and you're there.

Approaching from the iconic "photo-stop" point on US 163, they grew, breathtakingly, from inch-high Lego bricks to imposing skyscrapers. This view's known locally as "Gump Hill" after Forrest Gump stopped running there in the Tom Hanks film - one of many 20th century references locally attributed to the results of millions of years of natural history. If you look at a certain rock in Monument Valley a certain way, it's "Snoopy",

or so my Navajo guide told me on a sunset trip through the valley, where tribesfolk tolerate visitors taking pictures on their sacred land. The guided tour was every bit as mesmerising as the promise conveyed by those old John Wayne films - on hire, authentically enough, at the nearby Gouldings Lodge reception.

It truly is the pinnacle of Utah's sightseeing opportunities.

So, 10 days in the 45th US State, 1100 miles, seven ski resorts, all producing a lifetime of memories. With a permanent reminder forever looming closer to home over the banks of Loch Lomond, I won't have to look too far to remember them.

travelnews

UNLESS you've been sleeping for the past year, you can't have failed to notice that all-inclusive resorts are all the rage for the family market.

More than ever are featured in operators' programmes for summer 2010, and with all that competition, established all-inclusives are upping their game.

Four and five-star resorts are better value than ever. So where does that leave those in the three-star

category? Some travellers are upgrading to higher categories, but the demand for all-inclusives means three-star options will still have a good season.

All-inclusives make good financial sense and will continue to do well in the present economic climate.

This is likely to be the case in Turkey, with people becoming more aware of the excellent value on offer. Well under £400 will buy a week in a three-star Turkish all-inclusive such as the Riviera

Guler Resort in Gumbet, Club Armor and Noa Hotels' Nergis Select Hotel in Marmaris, and Club Sun City in Oludeniz.

When money is tight, the three-star properties will cater for those looking for the more affordable option, especially those who still prefer the western Mediterranean destinations such as Spain and its islands. Here are three of the best value options.

Almond Beach Village, Barbados. This family favourite has daily activities for kids aged

up to 15 and a free nursery. There's also a child-free section with three pools and an adults-only restaurant. Facilities include a golf course, spa, water-sports and a cooking school.

If you're looking for a friendly Barbados resort with plenty to offer, from fabulous restaurants to a range of sports, then this is the hotel for you.

The property is set in 32 acres of colourful tropical gardens and with the longest beach frontage of any hotel in Barbados. Prices

start at £1599 per adult and £949 per child for seven nights in July, including flights.

Biyadhoo, South Male Atoll, Maldives. People think the Maldives is all about five-star luxury, but there is excellent value all-inclusive accommodation on the islands. Biyadhoo is simple and quiet but there are plenty of watersports and diving options.

Seven nights from £999 per person, including flights, in May. **Hotel Jupiter and Saturno, Alcudia, Mallorca.** Guests

return year after year as it offers everything for the family - a kids' village with playground, club, mini-train, circus events, entertainment zone and disco. There's also an ice-cream bar, kids' pools, two lakes and a river.

For adults, the resort offers activities including t'ai chi, aqua fitness, jogging circuits, trampolines, body fitness, massage, breathing techniques and Pilates.

Seven nights cost from £369 per adult and £229 per child, in October, including flights.

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LOCH CITY

SOLITUDE:
Paul in the vast
expanses of
Monument
Valley



a radio DJ who also runs Moab's funky Red Rock bakery, playing Travis and Franz Ferdinand and to his desert customers - I motored south towards those massive sandstone forms.

Approaching from the iconic "photo-stop" point on US 163, they grew, breathtakingly, from inch-high Lego bricks to imposing skyscrapers. This view's known locally as "Gump Hill" after Forrest Gump stopped running there in the Tom Hanks film - one of many 20th century references locally attributed to the results of millions of years of natural history. If you look at a certain rock in Monument Valley a certain way, it's "Snoopy",

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BEAUTIFUL: At
Gooseneck Point



TWIN PEAKS:
The facilities at
Snowbasin
and, above,
skiing at Deer
Valley



FACTFILE

FLY: Glasgow to Salt Lake City from £335 or Edinburgh from £220 with Delta/KLM. American Airlines also fly there from the UK.
SKI RENTALS: Ski 'n' See, skisand.com.
Accommodation: Hampton Inn, Salt Lake City, hamptoninn.com; Ogden Marriott, marriott.com; The Yarrow Park City, yarrowparkcity.com; Sundance, sundance.com; Gouldings Lodge Monument Valley, gouldings.com; Sundance, sundance.com; Monument National Park, monumentnationalpark.org; Arches National Park, arches.org; Goose Neck State Park, stateparks.utah.gov/parks; **DETAILS:** www.utahtravel.com

It's one of the few places in Glasgow with a real sense of special occasion - but why wait for one of those? Just head in with your other half for a night of exquisite dining, luxury living and just a taxi-ride away. Sure beats that long trip to the Cheaptip airport bus.

www.malmaisoon.com
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TO celebrate the Blu-ray and DVD release of Disney's film UP, we have an amazing experience and adventure of a lifetime up for grabs to South America.

One lucky reader and a friend will win a five night holiday to Rio de Janeiro.

This fantastic prize includes return flights, return transfers from the airport to the hotel, five nights bed and breakfast accommodation at the four-star Atlantico Copacabana Hotel and travel insurance.

Our winner and 14 runners up will also win the UP Blu-ray combi-pack, which includes DVD.

In the movie, 78-year-old Carl Fredrickson ties thousands of balloons to his house and sets off on a journey to the lost world of his childhood dreams.

HOW TO ENTER

Correctly answer this question for a chance to win:
Q: Which of the following monuments is Rio well known for?
A) The Pyramids
B) Christ the Redeemer
C) The Taj Mahal

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2. One winner and 14 runners up selected at random after lines close from all correct entries received.
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4. Runners up each UP Blu-ray combi-pack (includes DVD) only.
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